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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION CONFIDENT IN ZULIA

Classified By: Francisco Fernandez, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The four major opposition parties are confident of maintaining control of the Zulia governorship, regaining control of Maracaibo, Venezuela's second largest city, as well as 17 of the 19 municipalities up for election. Outgoing governor Manuel Rosales is widely believed to be seeking the Maracaibo mayorship to boost the chances of his hand-picked successor Pablo Perez becoming governor and to use the mayor's office as a platform and piggy bank for a presidential run in 2012. Coalition members all agree that the unity strategy remains the only option for the foreseeable future but find Rosales and his UNT party to be heavy handed partners. End Summary.

12. (C) The western state of Zulia has long been considered a bulwark of opposition politics and opposition parties. Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT), Accion Democratica (AD), Primera Justicia (PJ) and COPEI are confident of their unity candidates carrying 17 of 19 municipalities as well as the statehouse. San Francisco city councilman of COPEI, Viapol Morales told PolOff that according to the government's own IVAD surveys, unity gubernatorial candidate Pablo Perez of the UNT party held a 14 point lead over PSUV Gian Carlo DiMartino. Although Morales' own bid for the mayorship failed to gain traction, Angel Sanchez, a UNT confidant of Governor Rosales, is 12 points ahead of PSUV Omar Prieto in the same survey. According to Morales and COPEI Secretary General for Zulia Nerio Romero, their party will carry Cabimas and Lagunillas, the two races apportioned to them.

13. (C) Venezuela's oldest party AD was decimated following the wrong-headed policy of abstention in the last presidential and national assembly elections; nevertheless, Secretary General Juan Carlos Velazco expects to win their four municipal elections as well as a seat in the state legislature. UNT enjoys a homefield advantage with party founder Rosales finishing two successful terms as governor. According to UNT Secretary General Gerardo Antunez, UNT expects to take nine municipalities including Maracaibo and San Francisco, Zulia's two largest population centers in addition to three seats in the state legislature. When asked why Rosales, having already been mayor of Maracaibo, would return to the city after being state governor, Antunez replied that it was to ensure the Zulia governorship stayed in opposition hands.

14. (C) Rosales is a force in Zulia and representatives of the coalition parties all winced when asked how it was working with Rosales and the UNT. Juan Pablo Guanipa of PJ had the sharpest criticism of Rosales (Note: Prior to Rosales entering the race, Guanipa had been the leading opposition candidate in Maracaibo and earned the grudging respect of other parties when he withdrew to make way for Rosales. End

Note) He likened Rosales' populist style, including pork barrel projects and cash give-aways to Chavez and pointed out that Rosales concedes no operating space to other parties. To illustrate the point, in the city of Machiques, Rosales' party refused to yield to a PJ mayoral candidate. As a result, PJ will have no mayors but UNT will have nine. Guanipa also told PolOff that Rosales ignored the offer of a joint appearance to endorse Rosales' candidacy and blew off a request to work on platform issues. Both AD and COPEI assured PolOff that since the 1999 constitution cut off public funding to political parties, Rosales would use Maracaibo and Zulia funds to make the UNT into a national party and position himself for a second presidential bid in 2012.

15. (C) Comment: The opposition's coalition is holding firm in Zulia, and members are willing to accept some of Rosales' strong arm tactics in exchange for riding his coat tails to victory. All party representatives agreed that if consensus candidates were to win this election, it is likely the same strategy would be used in the 2010 national assembly election. If he wishes to enjoy broad support beyond 2010, however, Rosales may need to be less dismissive of his coalition partners. End Comment.
CAULFIELD